

Rapa Nui Notes

4



Rapa Nui Notes is an international newsletter published four times per year for the benefit of all those interested in the archaeology and anthropology of Easter Island. Correspondence, brief articles, photographs, drawings, reviews of books and films, announcements of conferences and publications, and related materials are invited, but we cannot be responsible for unsolicited items or anything submitted without adequate return postage or International Reply Coupon. Subscription rates: US 4 issues \$12; foreign 4 issues \$20 sent airmail; US funds only, please. Address: Georgia Lee, Ph.D., Rapa Nui Notes, P.O. Box 1275, San Luis Obispo CA 93406 USA.

ISSN 0890-2097 ©Georgia Lee 1987

SUMMER 1987

Hangaroa News

Never one for drifting on a balsa raft in the vast South Pacific Ocean, I made my most recent trip to Easter Island in the lap of luxury--on the legendary Sea Cloud, a 4-masted, square-rigged sailing barque. As lecturer on this Smithsonian Institution cruise, I had the opportunity of savoring the elegant ship, fabulous food, and interesting passengers as we sailed from Panama to the Galapagos Islands, and then on to Rapa Nui. For ten days we saw no signs of life and really got the feeling for the enormity of the Pacific, and new respect for those intrepid Polynesians who set off in their double canoes. We finally arrived off the tip of Poike before dawn and gradually, as the outline of the island became visible, familiar landmarks began to appear. The island was green and lovely, and a brilliant rainbow arched over Rano Raraku as if in greeting.

We sailed along the south coast, around Motu Nui, and then at last Hangaroa came into view. Through field glasses I saw an amazing new structure at the head of Te Pito de Henua street! The remodeling of the Iglesia de Santa Cruz--a project headed by Nico Haoa--has transformed it. The structural changes include a new arched entry porch and a bell tower. Construction is continuing, and new woodcarvings will eventually grace the entry. The carvings will represent Fr. Sebastian Englert and Brother Eugene Eyraud.



The church's new facade gleams in the afternoon sun.

A wood carving of a kavakava figure was found floating off the south coast of the island not long ago. Theories abound as to its origin--perhaps it had been hidden in a secret cave since ancient times and only just was washed out into the ocean, etc. However, it is in fairly good condition and the inlaid eyes are intact. This argues against a great deal of age, given the rapid deterioration of wood on the island. It is in the hands of the Pakarati family who are charging 1000 pesos for a look. As a result, few have actually seen it.

Seiko watches of Japan have donated a town clock which now graces the intersection of Policarpo Toro and Te Pito de Henua Streets.

Rosita Cardinale has renamed her residencia; it is now called the Ota'i, and a spacious new dining room, bar, and kitchen are nearly completed.

Published by Kahuaike,

TH Mystery Fragment

According to El Mercurio and information received on the island, the most important finds made by Thor Heyerdahl during his Anakena dig are datable materials such as bones of turtle, dolphin, fish, and chicken. He also found a bone harpoon of the type used in the Marquesas. The excavations discovered a buried structure with vertical stonework and a pavement which dates (C-14) to 1100 A.D.; an earlier occupation dates to 800 A.D.

A wall, presumably of an earlier ahu, was uncovered; it is 70 meters long and the upper stones are visible on the surface. Some lumps of partially shaped coral were uncovered, but while these are modified, they are not "eyes" as was mistakenly reported in the Chilean press.

The almost complete lack of fish hooks at the lowest levels indicates to Heyerdahl that the first migrants were from Tiahuanaco, and thus they lacked a tradition of fishing. El Mercurio adds that, despite Heyerdahl's beliefs, all evidence coming from Polynesian archaeology points to the Marquesas as the place of origin for the first Easter Islanders.

A fragment of a very strange carving was also excavated. It has been called the "head of a female statue" with a "headdress". It has two worked cavities resembling eyes on one side, but other than that, I see little to recommend it as a statue of an anthropomorph, and to describe the broken top as a headdress is certainly stretching the imagination. As "eyes", the cavities are too close together and totally out of the mainstream of Rapa Nui sculptural aesthetics. Assymetrical knobs are on the sides and it has a decided ridge running down one side. This fragment is 97 cm high by 31 cm wide. What might this strange sculpture represent? We already have several interesting and pithy suggestions, and welcome yours!



An art gallery and bookstore is a new addition to the village of Hangaroa. Christian Walter's gallery will feature paintings and sculpture by island artists.

More vandalism has been reported, this time at the statue quarry, Rano Raraku. Moai #62 on the exterior slope of the quarry was badly damaged by two large sets of initials gouged on the chest of the statue. A construction worker from the mainland, employed in the renovation of the island's school building, was identified [apparently by his initials], and arrested.

[From personal reminiscences and notes written by Emily Mulloy in 1961; we are grateful to Emily for sharing her information with us.]

The mysterious and elusive Ahu Rikiriki was first reported by Thomson in 1891, and having appeared once in print, the site gathered authenticity over the years as more and more writers quoted from Thomson (and then Routledge) without making the considerable effort to check it out. It has never been photographed.

Thomson (1891:513) describes Rikiriki [trans: very small, very little] as being at the extreme southwest end of the island, remarkably placed midway between the sea and the top, on the face of a perpendicular cliff nearly 1000 feet high. He states that 16 small statues are lying on this platform and seem to be in excellent condition. "We could find no way of reaching the narrow ledge upon which this platform stands. No roads lead down from the top; it can not be approached from either side, and from below it is a straight up and down wall against which the sea dashes continually. It is hardly probable that the images were lowered from the top by ropes, and the natural conclusion is, that a roadway once existed...."

When Routledge (1919:174) came to the island 28 years later, she noted, "One row of images, on the extreme western edge of the crater of Rano Kao, which were visible, although inaccessible, at the time of the visit of the U.S.A. ship Mohican in 1886, are now lying on the shore a thousand feet below."

Clearly neither Thomson nor Routledge descended the cliffs to check out this so-called ahu and its 16 moai although, as she did visit the off-shore islet of Motu Nui, it is possible that Routledge viewed the site from sea.

Stories about this ahu continued, despite its improbable and unlikely location. When Emily and Bill Mulloy were on the island in 1960, during the late archaeologist's field work, various individuals pointed out the "statues" from above, and Father Sebastian Englert was convinced they must have been transported to their location by sea.

It hard to imagine how this ahu and its statues could have been placed in such a perilous place. The site was said to be located at the foot of the exterior crater wall of Rano Kau, between the precipice and the sea. The only possible access was from the sea, over dangerously rocky shore, or by rope descent of the cliff for some 100 meters. How did the ancient Easter Islanders manage to create an ahu there? And how did they manage to bring moai there, set them up, and carry on their ceremonies, and then later, destroy it?

December 1960 found Bill Mulloy confined to bed with hepatitis, which islanders thought had been brought on by "akuaku" spirits who were taking revenge for his having entered secret caves [more likely, it appears it was due to something he ate or drank on a passing ship which had recently come from Southeast Asia]. Emily set off on an expedition to see the legendary Rikiriki. She was accompanied by her daughter Kathy, the Chilean archaeologist Gonzalo Figueroa, and several other friends.

At this time, there were but three vehicles on the island. One belonged to the Navy, one to the Airforce, and one--a jeep left behind by the Heyerdahl expedition--belonged to Father Sebastian Englert. For this trip, they traveled by Airforce jeep.

The expedition's plan was for the men to descend the cliff while Emily took pictures. The jeep driver was to wait on top in case of an accident.

In those days, just to reach the drop off point was a trip in itself. To approach from the side of Orongo was impossible for the cliff drops off abruptly in all directions--toward the sea and toward the interior of the caldera. At Kari Kari, the crater wall has a large dip in it. Ahu Rikiriki was reputed to be just below the lowest point of Kari Kari so the plan was to reach it from the east. The group drove as far as Vinapu and then started up the side of the volcano. There were no roads in those days and several times it was necessary to stop and take down, and then replace, barbed wire fences that barred the way. Large chunks of basalt had to be moved in order to clear a path for the jeep.

Development Underway

A government project to remodel the school is in full swing. The buildings are receiving a face-lift plus new lighting and other improvements both to the classrooms and the auditorium. It is hoped that two more grades can be added to the school, taking the students through the 12th grade. Stress will be on vocational training.

The projected breakwater and harbor are shelved for the moment. Instead, there are plans to deepen the bay at Hanga Piko to accommodate larger boats from Chile. There is also talk of a fish packing plant to be built at Hanga Piko to process deep water fish which will presumably be caught by the Chilean fishing boats.

The government of Chile is providing prefab housing for needy islanders. These are being erected on land belonging to islanders who wish them for \$1000 U.S. If an islander has no land, the government is providing it. It is expected that there will be 100 of these houses up by next December. They are designed so that they can be added onto and expanded easily. As they are, they have 2 bedrooms, living/kitchen and bath. The government is also fixing up fifty unfinished houses already around the village. They will be roofed and stuccoed; windows and doors will be added, as well as electricity, and a bath. This certainly will be an improvement as many partially finished houses around the village constitute an eyesore.



One of the new prefabricated government houses built for islanders

Beginning in September, 2000 palms will be planted around the airport and the village to provide a more tropical effect for incoming tourists. Some concern was expressed for the palms now on the island that seem to be under attack from larvae. Any palm tree specialists out there amongst our readers?

The new archeological museum is completed and it is wonderful. Empty, but wonderful. The lighting and exhibits have not been installed. It has great promise, and I for one can hardly wait to see the finished product.

By the time they reached the cliff edge, it already was into the afternoon. Then time was needed to fix the ropes and prepare for the descent.

Even to reach the one "solid" rock to which a rope could be fastened involved a frightening half-crawling, half-sliding descent down a steep slope covered with slippery grass. Most of the rocks around the rim of the crater are themselves eroded and loosely attached, so that one must search to find one firm enough to bear the weight of men climbing down a rope. At last this was accomplished, and the men descended, one by one, and disappeared under the overhanging cliffs. Much later they could be seen again, as tiny doll-like figures, still descending on hands and knees due to the steepness of the slope. At last they reached the shoreline, being hidden at times by immense house-sized boulders which had fallen from the cliffs above.

It was almost dusk when they began to return to the top of the cliff. Gonzalo was the last to climb up, exhausted. But they had explored every possible bit of terrain below, without finding any trace of ahu, moai, or any other evidence of any sort of human activity.

From above, the large blocks of stone which have a rectangular shape might appear to be tipped-over statues, but on approaching them, they turned out to be naturally-fractured stone. Not only that, but had they been statues, their size would have dwarfed all but the largest moai at Rano Raraku.

The whole legend of Ahu Rikiriki thus proved to have no basis in fact. Like so many of the legends about Easter Island, it owed its perpetuation to the fact that no one before had ever bothered to investigate but had simply taken the word of others.

It didn't take long for word to get around the village. Stories now came out as to how they knew all the time that no ahu existed there. The same people who claimed to have seen it now changed their stories and remembered that as small children they had gone there to fish and there had been no ahu nor statues. This is one of the most characteristic traits of Easter Islanders: an ability to adapt a



Emily and Bill Mulloy on Easter Island in 1972
(Photo by Grant McCall)

story to fit the circumstances, whether to suit a particular listener's interest, or to fit a newly-discovered fact into the context of folklore.

By the following month when another trip was made to the other end of the island, Ahu Rikiriki had been moved, bag and baggage and statues, to an even less accessible location beneath the perpendicular cliffs at the foot of the extinct volcano, Poike. It will probably remain there, as few will care to risk their lives to disprove it.

In recent years, survey teams with the Universidad de Chile rechecked this same area and confirmed that no cultural remains lie below or on the cliffs. Yet old legends die hard; as late as 1984, islanders were still making references to Rikiriki and in addition, some insisted that a moai was located on the interior slopes of the caldera of Rano Kau. Lee personally checked this latter rumor, which also proved to be false. Today, rumors persist of buried petroglyph sites and "lost" caves with wonderful paintings and petroglyphs in them; are these for real, or are we again dealing with figments of imagination?



Lucia Riroroko & "Jaws" (Photo: Eric Hochberg).

A Great White shark was caught off Anakena last year; positive identification was made by a recent visitor to the island, Dr. Eric Hochberg of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History in California; Hochberg identified the shark by its AWESOME jaws--all that remained of the creature, for it was promptly eaten by islanders.

An Earthwatch project under the direction of Dr. Christopher Stevenson will take place on Easter Island in September of this year. The project will involve excavations in the area of the south coast. Contact Earthwatch for more information.

Conservation tests are still in process on the statue at Kio'e, plus test "spots" on statues at Anakena, One Mahiki, and Vaihu. Further checking and testing will continue in June. It is said that the product being tested will prevent further erosion and weathering of the stone.

The new Hotel Iorana, located on the cliffs south of Hanga Piko, is causing lots of exciting waves for tourists with its new salt water grotto/pool at the edge of the ocean.

Artifact Underfoot in DC

A petroglyph stone, originally from Orongo, has been spotted at the Carnegie Museum in Washington D.C. Described as a carved doorpost, it is illustrated in Katherine Routledge's Mystery of Easter Island (1919:Fig. 109) and since that time, it seemed to have disappeared from sight.

Charlie Love and the late R.P. Alexander re-discovered it when they literally stumbled over it. The stone is being used as a footscraper at the west entrance to the museum!

One might assume that almost anything could be a foot scraper, but a petroglyph from Orongo belongs inside a museum. It would be a nice gesture if they returned it to Rapa Nui for display in the new museum.

A beautiful new full-color photographic essay about Rapa Nui is in the island's stores. Published in Chile, the text is in English, Spanish, and French. The photographs are outstanding. The title is *Rapa Nui, donde cordialidad no es un misterio*, by George Munro; both the quality of the pictures and the vision of the artist are excellent. In the Forward, the author states, "Values so vital to today's man, such as tenderness, culture and peace, remain constantly available to humanity in this isolated spot of the world." The publisher is Publicidad y Ediciones S.A., Santiago de Chile, 1985; I hope to have information on how this can be obtained in the U.S. in the next issue of *Rapa Nui Notes*.

Also new on the island this year are excellent full-color maps. These are a vast improvement over the previously available ones. They unfold to measure 25 by 35 inches, and sell on the island for U.S. \$10. For information, contact Antoni Pujador, Balms 334-335, 2an, 4b; 08006, Barcelona, Spain.

Discover magazine, May 1987, has an interesting short article about Rapa Nui (page 9). It is titled "Toppled Statues and Upended Theories", and cites Dr. Jo Anne Van Tilburg's statue research. The article concludes: "Experts on Oceania have...convincingly presented the case that the practices of the original Rapa Nui...were similar to those of peoples throughout Polynesia. For his part, Heyerdahl...continues promoting his own theories, while presenting no compelling new evidence on their behalf."

The Museo Sociedad Fonck in Vina del Mar has a nice new catalog concerning the Rapa Nui artifacts in their collections. Its title: *Catalogo de la coleccion Pascuense*.

Ana Maria Arredondo has a manuscript (in Spanish) looking for a publisher. It is about tattooing and body painting on Easter Island and covers pigment, tapa figures, and legends concerning tattoo, illustrated by photographs and drawings. Her manuscript also includes biographies of the last two females on the island who were tattooed.

The current issue of *Rock Art Research*, the Journal of the Australian Rock Art Research Association, Volume 4 (1), May 1987, has a four-page illustrated article about Easter Island by Georgia Lee, and titled "The cosmic komari." The paper discusses the ubiquitous vulva form petroglyph found on the island, and its significance for ancient Polynesian sexual mores in general.

Papers concerning rock art conservation were presented at the recent American Rock Art Research Association meeting, May 23-25 in St. George, Utah. As part of this landmark conference, a report titled "Problems of Conservation and Preservation of Rock Art on Easter Island" was presented by Georgia Lee. These papers will be published by ARARA in the near future.

JNWA Features Easter Island

The Institute of Archaeology at UCLA is offering a 10% discount on their Easter Island issue to readers of *Rapa Nui Notes*. This is the *Journal of New World Archaeology* VII:1, 1986, which sells for \$8; readers may order for \$7.20 plus \$1.50 postage/handling. This 72 page paperback volume has maps, drawings and black and white photographs, glossary and references; it contains papers by Sergio Rapu, Jo Anne Van Tilburg, Christopher Stevenson and Claudio Cristino, Georgia Lee, and Joan Seaver. Subjects range from prehistoric settlement patterns to statues and petroglyphs, to ethnoarchaeology. Write Journal of New World Archaeology, The Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024.

Anyone for Zagreb?

The 12th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences will be held in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, from July 24-31, 1988. Two symposia on Easter Island will be held as part of the proceedings: 1) *Easter Island--Archaeology, Ethnology and Linguistics*. For information, contact the organizer, S.V. Rjabchikov, Krasnoarmejskaja 1, Krasnodar 350023, USSR; and 2) *Island Archaeology*, contact William S. Ayers, Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403.

Back Issues Available

If you want to have a complete set of *Rapa Nui Notes* and missed some, earlier issues are available for U.S. \$3 each.

Coming in Future Issues

"Religious Records in the Easter Island Tablets," by Sergej V. Rjabchikov [USSR]; and "The Many Names of Easter Island," by Alan S. Coulson.

Rapa Nui Notes 4
P.O. Box 1275
San Luis Obispo CA 93406



SUMMER 1987